

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Reintroduction of spotfin chub

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The spotfin chub is an unassuming little fish – growing up to about four inches long, with an unimpressive appearance, save during the breeding season when males turn an iridescent blue on the upper side of their bodies. However, this tiny fish is on the federal endangered species list and one biologist is trying to reestablish in Western North Carolina's Cheoah River.

This was the second year the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission stocked the Cheoah with these fish, putting 844 in the river as the latest chapter in an effort to bring back the river's biodiversity. For decades the nine-mile river reach between Lake Santeetlah and its confluence with the Little Tennessee River was largely dewatered as Alcoa Power Generating, Inc. captured the river at their Santeetlah Dam and piped the water to a powerhouse on the Little Tennessee River.

However, thanks to a commitment made by APGI, water began flowing again in 2005, following a regime that mimics the natural seasonal flow levels. The timing of this spotfin chub release coincides with the natural low flows of summer and fall which provide stable, productive habitats for incubation and development of larval fishes.

The spotfin chub is the latest in a series of reintroductions aimed at resorting aquatic life to this stretch of river. Wavy-rayed lampmussels and the wounded darter, a small, bottom-dwelling fish, are also being reintroduced. Other species on the horizon for stocking in the Cheoah include the rainbow and Appalachian elktoe mussels.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.